

Luke 24:44-53

May 28, '17

“JOYFUL SORROW”

I LOVE WILLARD LIBRARY.

ASIDE FROM THE LEGENDARY GHOST OF WILLARD, IT HAS SUCH A GREAT HISTORY & IT’S SUCH A FRIENDLY & COMFORTABLE ENVIRONMENT.

IN ADDITION TO THE INCREDIBLE GENEALOGY DEPARTMENT, WILLARD HAS NEARLY EVERY BOOK I EVER NEED.

I SAY “NEARLY” BECAUSE NOT LONG AGO I WAS LOOKING FOR A NEWLY-PUBLISHED BOOK THAT WILLARD DIDN’T YET HAVE.

“NO PROBLEM,” SAID THE LIBRARIAN. “WE’LL ORDER IT.”

I ASKED IF THEY WOULD BE PURCHASING IT ANYWAY AND SHE SAID, *“I’M NOT SURE, BUT WE*

LOVE TO ORDER BOOKS FOR PEOPLE. I'LL LET YOU KNOW WHEN IT COMES IN."

AND, SURE ENOUGH, WITHIN 10 DAYS OR SO, I GOT A CALL TELLING ME IT HAD ARRIVED.

I FIRST HEARD ABOUT THE BOOK FROM OUR SON, DAVID WHO, WITH A PHILOSOPHY DEGREE, ALWAYS LETS ME KNOW ABOUT FASCINATING NEW BOOKS THAT COVER BIZARRE TOPICS.

THIS ONE HAPPENED TO BE CENTERED ON THE MOST-COMMONLY-USED NOUN IN THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE.

THAT LITTLE DETAIL SURPRISED ME AS MUCH AS ANYTHING AND SENT ME TO WILLARD IN SEARCH OF THE BOOK THAT FOCUSED ON THAT MOST-COMMONLY-USED NOUN.

**WHAT ALL OF THAT HAS TO DO WITH THIS
PASSAGE IS PERHAPS UP FOR DISCUSSION.**

**AS WE CONSIDER THESE WORDS AT THE VERY
END OF LUKE'S GOSPEL, IT CAN BE HELPFUL TO
CONSIDER WHAT THE PREVIOUS WEEKS HAD BEEN
LIKE FOR THE DISCIPLES.**

**THEY'VE BEEN ON A ROLLER-COASTER OF
EMOTIONS.**

**GO ALL THE WAY BACK TO THE RAISING OF
LAZARUS FROM THE DEAD.**

**THIS HAD TO BE ONE OF THE MOUNTAINTOP
MOMENTS IN THEIR EXPERIENCE WITH JESUS.**

**THEIR FRIEND LAZARUS HAD BEEN DEAD FOR
FOUR DAYS.**

**HE HAD BEEN WRAPPED IN BURIAL CLOTHS &
LAID IN A TOMB.**

**AND THEN, WITH SIMPLY A COMMAND –
“LAZARUS, COME FORTH!” – JESUS BRINGS HIM BACK
FROM THE DEAD.**

**BUT HOW QUICKLY THEY WENT FROM THAT
PINNACLE OF ECSTASY TO THE DEEPEST VALLEY OF
DOOM AS THEY WATCHED JESUS DIE ON THE CROSS.**

**AH, BUT AGAIN, HOW QUICKLY THINGS
CHANGED WHEN HE CAME BACK FROM THE DEAD &
ENTERED THEIR LIVES ONCE MORE.**

BUT THEN COMES ASCENSION DAY.

**ONCE AGAIN, THE ROLLER-COASTER RIDE
TAKES THEM INTO A DARK VALLEY OF DESPAIR.**

**LUKE TELLS US “...*HE WITHDREW FROM THEM
AND WAS CARRIED UP INTO HEAVEN.*”**

AND NOW HE’S GONE FOR GOOD.

**YOU EXPECT THE NEXT LINE FROM LUKE TO BE
SOMETHING LIKE – “*AND THE DISCIPLES WERE
FILLED WITH ANGUISH, HANGING THEIR HEADS IN
DESPAIR & GRIEF.*”**

**WHAT ELSE COULD THEY BE FEELING BUT
DESPAIR, GRIEF & SORROW!?**

**THEIR AGONY & HEARTBREAK WOULD HAVE
BEEN OVERWHELMING.**

**“*WHAT DO WE DO NOW?
HOW DO WE CARRY ON WITHOUT HIM?
AFTER COMING BACK FROM THE DEAD, HOW CAN
HE LEAVE US ALONE LIKE THIS?*”**

**ALL OF THESE THOUGHTS SURELY WOULD
HAVE BEEN RUNNING THROUGH THEIR MINDS.**

BUT LUKE DOESN'T SAY ANYTHING LIKE THAT.

**INSTEAD HE SAYS, “...HE WITHDREW FROM THEM
AND WAS CARRIED UP INTO HEAVEN. AND THEY
WORSHIPED HIM, AND RETURNED TO JERUSALEM
WITH GREAT JOY...”**

**IT DOESN'T SEEM TO MAKE SENSE, DOES IT?
WHY WOULD THEY REACT WITH JOY WHEN
THEY LOGICALLY SHOULD HAVE BEEN FILLED
WITH SORROW?**

**THEIR FRIEND, THEIR LEADER, THEIR SAVIOR IS
LEAVING THEM, SEEMINGLY FOREVER.**

**HOW COULD THEY POSSIBLY BE EXPERIENCING
WHAT CAN ONLY BE DESCRIBED AS “JOYFUL
SORROW?”**

HERE'S WHAT I THINK IT IS.

**I THINK WE HAVE MISUNDERSTOOD THE
ASCENSION – AT LEAST PARTIALLY.**

**THERE'S A CHURCH IN NORFOLK, ENGLAND
THAT HAS A NUMBER OF ALTARS.**

**ONE OF THOSE ALTARS IS DEDICATED TO THE
FEAST OF THE ASCENSION.**

TRY TO GET A PICTURE OF THIS IN YOUR MIND.

**ABOVE THE ALTAR IS A SCULPTURE OF CLOUDS,
CARVED IN WOOD.**

**FROM THE MIDST OF THESE CLOUDS, THERE
ARE TWO FEET PROTRUDING.**

**SOMEONE WHO SAW IT SUGGESTED IT
REMINDED THEM OF THE REMAINS OF THE WICKED
WITCH IN "*THE WIZARD OF OZ.*"**

**BUT, AS SILLY AS IT SEEMS, THAT'S THE
PICTURE WE HAVE OF THE ASCENSION.**

**JESUS IS LIFTED UP & A CLOUD TAKES HIM OUT
OF THE SIGHT OF THE DISCIPLES.**

BUT, YOU SEE, HERE'S THE PROBLEM WE RUN INTO - WHEN WE WONDER WHERE HE WENT & WHEN WE ASK THAT QUESTION, WE ASK IT IN TERMS OF GEOGRAPHY OR PHYSICAL LOCATION.

WHERE IS THE *PLACE* THAT JESUS WENT WHEN HE ASCENDED?

I THINK WE CAN CATCH A CLUE FROM THE REACTION OF THE DISCIPLES.

WHAT DOES LUKE SAY THEY DID?

"...THEY WORSHIPED HIM, AND RETURNED TO JERUSALEM WITH GREAT JOY; AND THEY WERE CONTINUALLY IN THE TEMPLE BLESSING GOD."

OKAY, THINK ABOUT THIS.

NOT ONLY DID THEY GO WITH GREAT JOY, BUT WHERE IS IT THEY WENT?

THEY WENT TO JERUSALEM.

THEY WENT TO THE TEMPLE.

**NOW HERE WAS A GROUP OF MEN WHO, AFTER
THE RESURRECTION, WERE TERRIFIED AS THEY
LOOKED TO THE FUTURE.**

THEY WERE AFRAID OF THE ROMANS.

**THEY WERE AFRAID OF THE RELIGIOUS
LEADERS.**

THEY WERE AFRAID FOR THEIR VERY LIVES.

**BUT HERE WE'RE TOLD THEY RETURNED TO
JERUSALEM – NOT IN SADNESS & SORROW, NOT IN
FEAR & TERROR – BUT WITH GREAT JOY!**

THEY WENT IN *JOYFUL SORROW*.

NOW WHY WOULD THAT BE?

**WHY – FIRST OF ALL, WOULD THEY RETURN TO
JERUSALEM - AND WHY WOULD THEY DO SO WITH
GREAT JOY?**

**WELL, FIRST OF ALL, THEY RETURNED TO
JERUSALEM BECAUSE THAT'S WHERE JESUS TOLD
THEM TO GO.**

**AND SECONDLY, THEY RETURNED WITH GREAT
JOY BECAUSE THEY UNDERSTOOD SOMETHING
ABOUT THE ASCENSION THAT WE HAVEN'T QUITE
BEEN ABLE TO GRASP.**

**WHAT'S OUR TRADITIONAL UNDERSTANDING OF
THE ASCENSION?**

**WHY DID THE ASCENSION HAVE TO TAKE
PLACE?**

**HAVEN'T WE ALWAYS BEEN TAUGHT THAT
JESUS TOOK UP HIS HEAVENLY DOMINION OVER
ALL CREATION?**

**HAVEN'T WE LEARNED THAT JESUS HAD TO
LEAVE THE EARTH BECAUSE, WHILE HE WAS HERE,**

**HE WAS CONFINED TO BEING IN ONE PLACE BUT
AFTER HE ASCENDED HE COULD BE ANYWHERE &
EVERYWHERE?**

THERE'S NOTHING WRONG WITH THAT.

I BELIEVE ALL OF THAT IS TRUE.

**BUT WHY NOT TAKE IT A STEP FURTHER &
UNDERSTAND THAT WITH THE ASCENSION, JESUS
WAS NO LONGER CONSTRAINED, NOT ONLY BY
PLACE, BUT BY *TIME* AS WELL?**

**AND THERE IT IS – THAT MOST-COMMONLY-
USED WORD IN THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE – TIME.**

**THE BOOK THAT WILLARD LIBRARY ORDERED
FOR ME IS ENTITLED WHY TIME FLIES – A MOSTLY
SCIENTIFIC INVESTIGATION.**

THE AUTHOR, ALAN BURDICK, SAYS, “*HERE’S ONE OF THE FIRST THINGS THAT I LEARNED ABOUT TIME.*”

I WOULD GO AROUND TO SCIENTISTS AND ASK THEM – ‘WHAT IS TIME EXACTLY?’

AND THEY WOULD ALL TURN IT AROUND ON ME AND SAY, ‘WELL, WHAT DO YOU MEAN BY TIME?’

THE POINT BEING THAT WHAT WE CALL TIME IS ACTUALLY A LOT OF DIFFERENT EXPERIENCES.

IT’S UNDERSTANDING WHAT THE TIME OF DAY IS, BUT IT’S ALSO UNDERSTANDING THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN BEFORE AND AFTER.”

I TRIED READING BURDICK’S BOOK, DIDN’T GET THROUGH IT IN THE TIME ALOTTED, AND RENEWED IT.

**THAT STILL WASN'T ENOUGH TIME, SO I
RETURNED IT, AND AFTER WHAT I THOUGHT WAS A
SUITABLE PERIOD OF TIME FOR SOMEONE ELSE TO
HAVE A CRACK AT IT, WENT BACK TO WILLARD AND
CHECKED IT OUT A SECOND TIME!**

**FOR THOSE SKEPTICAL ABOUT “TIME” BEING
THE MOST-COMMONLY-USED WORD IN THE
ENGLISH LANGUAGE – IN THE PREVIOUS TWO
SENTENCES, I USED THE WORD FOUR TIMES – OH,
THERE IT IS AGAIN!**

TIME IS A VERY CONFUSING CONCEPT!

**BURDICK – ALONG WITH MOST OTHERS WHO
HAVE STUDIED TIME – TURNS TO ST. AUGUSTINE AS
ONE OF THE EARLIEST TO HAVE EXPLORED THIS
VAST MYSTERY.**

ACCORDING TO BURDICK, AUGUSTINE WOULD SAY, “*THERE IS ONLY NOW.*

THERE'S NO PAST, PRESENT AND FUTURE.

THERE'S ONLY YOUR CURRENT AWARENESS OF THE PAST, WHICH IS YOUR MEMORY.

AND THERE'S ONLY YOUR CURRENT AWARENESS OF THE FUTURE, WHICH IS EXPECTATION.

AND THERE'S ONLY YOUR CURRENT AWARENESS OF THE PRESENT, WHICH IS YOUR ATTENTION.”

THIS CONFUSION & MYSTERY ABOUT TIME CREATES A PROBLEM FOR US AS WE TRY TO UNDERSTAND SOMETHING AS INCOMPREHENSIBLE AS THE ASCENSION.

THE PROBLEM IS THAT WE THINK OF HEAVEN AS ANOTHER *PLACE*, AS THERE ARE *PLACES* IN THE WORLD.

IF JESUS ASCENDS TO HEAVEN, THEN HE MUST GO TO THAT OTHER *PLACE*.

BUT THAT DOESN'T SEEM TO BE ALL THAT LUKE IS TELLING US HERE & IT'S SOMETHING THE DISCIPLES SEEMED TO UNDERSTAND.

THEY UNDERSTOOD THAT, WHEREVER THEY WENT, JESUS WOULD BE THERE.

AND THAT ISN'T CONFINED TO A *PLACE*.

IT MEANS THAT JESUS IS IN EVERY FUTURE TIME & EVERY FUTURE EXPERIENCE WE WILL EVER GO THROUGH.

IN BOTH MATTHEW'S & MARK'S ACCOUNT OF THE RESURRECTION, WHEN HIS FOLLOWERS LOOK FOR JESUS AT THE EMPTY TOMB, THEY ARE TOLD, "*HE HAS GONE AHEAD OF YOU.*"

**OUR LIMITED HUMAN COMPREHENSION
PREVENTS US FROM THINKING OF THAT AS
ANYTHING BUT JESUS GOING AHEAD OF THEM TO A
PLACE – A PHYSICAL LOCATION WHERE THEY WILL
SEE HIM.**

**DON'T CONFINE YOURSELF TO THAT WAY OF
THINKING.**

**YES – JESUS WILL BE IN WHATEVER *PLACE* YOU
FIND YOURSELF.**

**BUT HE WILL ALSO BE IN WHATEVER
CIRCUMSTANCE YOU FIND YOURSELF BECAUSE HE
HAS GONE AHEAD OF YOU IN *TIME* AS WELL.**

**IN EVERY EVENT, EVERY TRIAL, EVERY PAINFUL
ORDEAL, EVERY JOYOUS EXPERIENCE IN *TIME* THAT
AWAITS YOU IN THE FUTURE – JESUS IS ALREADY
THERE!**

**GOD GIVES US THE ASSURANCE THAT IN EVERY
FUTURE MOMENT OF OUR LIVES, JESUS IS THERE.**

**WHEN A LOVED ONE UNEXPECTEDLY DIES,
JESUS IS ALREADY THERE IN THAT FUTURE
MOMENT, WAITING TO COMFORT US.**

**WHEN THE DOCTOR DELIVERS GRIM NEWS
ABOUT OUR HEALTH, JESUS IS THERE TO SEE US
THROUGH.**

**WHEN A JOB IS TERMINATED & OUR DREAMS LIE
IN RUINS, JESUS IS ALREADY THERE TO HELP US
PICK UP THE PIECES & LOOK AHEAD WITH HOPE.**

**FOR THOSE WHO ARE GRADUATING, WHEN
THEY STEP INTO THE WORLD IN A NEW VENTURE,
JESUS IS ALREADY THERE TO WALK BY THEIR SIDE
& LEAD THEM INTO THE FUTURE HE HAS PREPARED
FOR THEM.**

**YOU SEE, THAT’S THE PART OF THE ASCENSION
THAT THE DISCIPLES SAW THAT WE HAVEN’T QUITE
LEARNED TO GRASP.**

**THAT’S WHY *THEY* “RETURNED TO JERUSALEM
WITH GREAT JOY.”**

YES, THEY RETURNED WITH JOYFUL SORROW.

**AS YOU LOOK AHEAD, BE ASSURED THAT ALL
THE PLACES & ALL THE *TIMES* THAT STAND BEFORE
YOU, ARE PLACES AND TIMES WHERE JESUS
ALREADY RESIDES. AMEN.**

*The Reverend Dr. Dennis R. Davenport
Eastminster Presbyterian Church
Evansville, Indiana*